Soles4Souls/Running Warehouse 2013.
An Application of Communication Principles in Non Profit Event Planning.

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by

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Creating Charitable Impulse

The Art of Persuasion is the manner in which men are led to believe and behave in accordance with another's will. As humans we each have our own desires and interests. What leads another human into being persuaded? Certainly one must be attracted to what the "persuader" is presenting. The "persuadee" must also believe in what it is that you are proposing. The proposition must contain inherent worth that aligns with their own core values. The persuader must address the core elements of the other person's personality and beliefs. Who exactly are you trying to persuade is a question that must be answered. What is important to this person or group of people? Considered in this light, the art of persuasion seems to become more the art of pleasing rather than convincing.

Inspiration

When my partner Tiffany and I first began to brainstorm ideas for events where persuasion would be at work, this notion of core values became a question we had to answer. Tiffany and I were selected to be random dorm roommates our freshmen year at Cal Poly. From that year on we have continued to remain roommates, fellow Mustang athletes, and Communication Studies majors. As we both carry very similar interests and values, it was obvious to us that we should join our strengths for our senior project. We had to decide what is something that engages the both of us? What would benefit not only us but also other people? I wanted my senior project to revolve around something that would not only hold personal interest but also make a difference within others lives. Both of us as avid runners, we decided to put on an event utilizing Sole4Souls, a charity that helps donate old athletic shoes to adults and children in need around the world.

Sole4Souls mission is to collect and donate used shoes to the world's poor, their attempt to mitigate poverty. To begin this charitable effort we would work with San Luis Obispo's Running Warehouse. Our set goal would be to persuade people to attend our event at Running Warehouse. The price of admission would be one dollar, and a pair of old running or athletic shoes. The money would help cover shipping. Our next question then became, exactly how do you persuade people to want to participate in your charitable efforts?

Persuasion

There seems to always be things in life that we feel we ought to be doing for the benefit of others. Doing good is certainly a worthy cause in general, but often this is not enough. What seems to persuade others most often is not exactly what you say but how you are perceived. People must trust you, and initially this can be both the easiest and the most difficult task. The first thing you can do is properly introduce yourself. Ask for their name in return and use it. Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, writes that "…a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language. And its value is immeasurable when interacting with others".

Another influential voice in the realm of persuasion is Daniel O'Keefe. "Persuasion is a communicative function that can be pursued in many different settings, ranging from face-to-face interaction to mass communication. Mass media persuasion takes three primary overt forms: commercial advertising, pro-social advertising, and face to face interaction" (35). When marketing our Sole4Souls event we chose to focus face-to-face interaction, social media integration, as well as campaign advertising. Since

Tiffany works weekly for Running Warehouse, and I work for Mindbody, our simplest form of persuasion was through word of mouth.

At Mindbody, fitness and health is a huge part of our company environment. I chose to incorporate these factors into an email sent throughout the company. First, by reiterating how Mindbody greatly values the importance of mental and physical health, and how this can also be coordinated with helping others. I then went into more detail about Sole4Souls as a company, and encouraged my coworkers to join me in leveraging physical fitness into helping those in need. The vision is to improve the health and wellness of the world. After sending out this electronic email, I continued to bring it up to my co-workers. I would address each person by name, as Carnegie suggested, and ask them personally if they planned on attending our event. I noticed that while some people were at a loss of words when asked such a question, most matched my enthusiasm with an excited response. It seemed using a simple gesture such as walking up to a person, addressing them by name, and requesting their attendance, that they felt more obliged to attend.

Pro-Social Communication

When talking with them, many were enthused by the chance to help children and adults in need. O'Keefe describes the use of Pro-Social communication, "Pro-social communication campaigns (sometimes termed "social marketing," because such campaigns apply familiar marketing tools to pro-social ends) aim to forward environmental or charitable causes or to advance health-related ends such as encouraging people to exercise, quit smoking, and so forth. Research on health promotion communication has been informed by such theoretical approaches" (35). Most seemed

excited to help out as it is a correlation between fitness, and helping people in need. Others seemed more inclined because it would be helping me out. Thus, the motivations for each person's attendance seemed to differ.

When advertising for our event we tried to use a similar model to this, by first addressing the need for physical and mental health, continuing on to how this can be helped through charitable events (help yourself by helping others). Since "you" are such an active and healthy being, help people in need by donating your old athletic shoes. Our marketing strategy: help individuals serve a bigger purpose than themselves, in return reaping the mental satisfaction of doing so. O'Keefe also describes how you should go about your direct advertising for an event: "Studies of consumer advertising have examined the role of endorsements in consumer advertising, effects of varying the frequency and timing of advertisements, the role of visual elements" (36). It was challenging to figure out the perfect timing for launching our marketing campaign. The key would be the way in which we timed our event as well as framed our overall concept.

Micro Rhythms

Another factor to consider when persuading our audience was nonverbal technique. Gladwell talks about the, "study of cultural micro-rhythms, which relates to small normally, unobservable, nor controlled micro-body movements. There is also a conversational rhythm that takes place unconsciously. You can draw others into your own rhythms and thereby dictate the terms of interaction" (104). The important thing that Tiffany and I must keep into consideration is that emotion is contagious. We must create various answers to a number of possible objections. We have studied throughout various Communication courses that with subtle body mimicking, the more likable you will be

perceived. The more likable we are perceived then the more persuasive our message will be. Our overall goal for our event would be to make our idea a memorable epidemic.

Message Framing

Within the article, "Improving the Effectiveness of Fundraising Messages: The Impact of Charity Goal Attainment, Message Framing, and Evidence on Persuasion" by Enny Das, Peter Kerkhof & Joyce Kuiper. In this article they experimented with the effectiveness of fundraising messages. Their study revolved around the different methods of framing and how fundraising should contain statistical information, a negative message frame or a positive message frame. Regarding charitable attainment their hypothesis concerning social dilemmas was that the more statistical information provided, the more donations. There are many well thought out non-profit organizations however, most seem not as successful as they could have been. How do you deem one charity event to be better than another? What makes for a successful event when the ideas and motives behind the actual event are equally righteous? It seems that more often than not the charitable events that are successful are the ones seen as more popular. What is the latest celebrity helping with, is it Africa or India, is it regarding the building of more homes or human trafficking? How the does a certain charity even become popular.

Present research suggests the importance of a persuasive framework that integrates communication framing. "Message framing is the decision to focus on the positive consequences of donating or the negative consequences of not donating and on message evidence, which can be presented in an abstract, statistical way or in a more vivid and anecdotal manner" (Das, Kerkoff, Kuiper 164). The authors point out that an overall charitable goal must be stated and fundraising messages must reinforce the

importance of goal obtainment. Given the rapidly growing number of charities, a particularly challenging task is to convey to the public that the charitable cause is valid, urgent, and serious enough to compete with other charities.

Types of Evidence

One strategy for influencing the perceived urgency of a certain situation is to include evidence (Reynolds 528). This can be done through the use of statistical analysis, testimonials, narrative reports, and factual statements. A similar example to what they give in the article could be, 10,000 people will die from lack of clean water if we do not support them. Another example of this would be the many case studies explaining the life of one specific individual. TV and mass media use these types of detailed stories to connect the audience with a specific individual. This actualization makes the cause spring to life, and calls out for immediate aid. The question then becomes which type of evidence is the most persuasive to use. "Some theorists have argued that vivid, narrative case histories are more compelling than abstract, statistical information because they evoke stronger mental imagery, reduce counterarguments, and have a stronger intuitive appeal" (Green, Brock, Kaufman 321).

Others have argued that statistical evidence is more persuasive than narratives (Baesler, Burgoon 591). Some have proposed that the relative efficacy of different types of evidence may be moderated by receiver characteristics such as judgmental orientation and value congruence (Dennis, Babrow 333). Studies have found that cognitive reactions are more linked to statistical evidence, while narrative evidence influences emotional reactions. Your specific cause would then influence the tool you should choose as your persuasion factor. Authors describe the tool of persuasion as a use of "mental shortcuts"

describing this concept of framing, and "loss versus gain frames" (Dennis Babrow 333). You must choose whether or not you want to frame your message positively or negatively, and which will be more valuable. An example of a negatively phrased message would be the one I mentioned earlier of, 10,000 people will die from lack of clean water if we do not support them. If I wanted to change my message to be framed more positively it could read: With our direct support, we can save 10,000 people from dying from lack of clean water. Communication theorists have yet to determine exactly which, positive or negatively phrased messages seem to be the most persuasive. After sitting down and discussing the ways Tiffany and I could display our message, we decided to go the positive direction. The majority of our audience would be colleagues our own age, and we felt it most convincing to use a positive approach.

The way messages are directly framed seems to be less of a problem when constructing a charitable event. The main challenge is getting people motivated to act. There are numerous ways to capture a person's attention for a moment, but what we desire is to create the sense of responsibility. The processing of information from your marketing efforts must motivate people, and make your charity/event stand out from competing events. Research suggests that the most effective way to make your event salient is to make people think. Within this case then it would be more beneficial to use statistical evidence as your means for persuading. The more statistical evidence presented, the more cognition, and thus a greater increase in the effectiveness of negatively framed messages. Whether or not this will cause a sufficient increase is questionable. Most would agree, however, that in order to gain sufficient donations the likelihood of the goal must be very high.

Social Trap

Another major challenge when asking for donations is influencing people to be less self-absorbed and more concerned about the collective well being. They describe a sort of trap that an audience can face, called a "social trap" (Davis 241). This can be described as "behaviors that are gratifying for the individual in the short term imply long-term punishments for the collective. A social fence exists when the short-term aversive consequences of an act keep us from performing this act, even though it would entail long-term benefits for the collective. Thus, in the case of a social fence, the short-term rational choice is to do nothing rather than to do something" (Messick, Brewer 22). Simply put, it is easier for individuals to remain focused on themselves and not be willing to donate money.

Individual/Collective

Another factor to consider: individual personalities. (Ghingold 446). Ghingold proposed that individual characteristics that mediate the effects of the guilt arousing communications include loss of control, self-blame, and inherent guilt. That people who have low self-esteem tend to experience higher levels of guilt, which paralyze rather than motivate (Ghingold, 446).

Our goal is to persuade individuals to think more collectively, and to do this by attending our Sole4Souls event. We choose to challenge our individuals to confront this social dilemma and select collective well being over self-interest. One way in which you can align self-interest with this collective awareness is to appeal to both. People are not going to donate to a cause that they do not feel is important. Given that every individual

carries their own interests and opinions, we would make them feel that the need for shoes in Africa is an admirable cause and should be of vital concern to them.

Secondly, authors point out that people must feel a direct link to the charity. Individuals will not contribute if they do not feel as though their donation will have a direct impact. Other authors believe that clearly communicating the very specific goal of your event will encourage others to donate money (Davis 241). Thus, when promoting our event, describing the likelihood towards a specific goal is key. It frames the message that if you do help, you are involved in this decision making process and your actions will help solve the problem.

Conditional Cooperation

Another factor to consider, as Frey and Meier discuss, is the use of conditional cooperation. The concept of conditional cooperation presumes individuals are more likely to participate because there is evidence that others are contributing as well. It is safe to conclude that goal attainment seems to be the most prominent factor when planning your event. This begs the question; how do we determine an appropriate goal? Myers helped us reach our overall goal by introducing three steps. He describes these three steps as essential to possible donors and their decision on whether or not to donate. First we would consider the number of anticipated participants. (Frey, Meier 172). Our goal would be to help us, help others, by reaching at least 100 pairs of shoes for Soles4Souls. We would have to portray the realistic lack of shoes in areas in a vivid manner, but not make it seem so popular that people might assume it was an issue already being addressed by many. The framing of our persuasive message must highlight the importance of each individual's contribution in meeting our overall goal while also emphasizing the fact that

many others have already begun to help, and do this through means of a type of guilt appeal.

Guilt Appeals

"Guilt Appeals: Persuasion, Knoweldge and Charitable Giving", by Hibber, Smith, Davies, Ireland, they describe the popularity of guilt appeals. Contrary to the opinions of previous authors, it seems that good old-fashioned Guilt works better than statistical analysis. These types of guilt-works seem to be very effective everywhere within our society, yet is it wrong morally? Hibber and authors suggest that in order to escape this feeling of wrong doing, charitable hosts will claim that they did not attempt to endorse feelings of guilt. "The focus of research on guilt appeals has generally centered on the direct relationships between emotions experienced and behavioral responses to the advertisement and the effectiveness of the campaigns. These approaches have commonly associated themselves (explicitly or implicitly) with the perspective that portrays the consumer as a relatively passive conduit or decoder in a linear process of communication" (Hibbert, Smith, Davies, Ireland 733).

These authors discuss the discovery of guilt appeals within advertising during the early 1980's. Marketing discovered that positive effects on behavior arose from a change in attitude that began with emotions. These authors suggest three different types of guilt to evoke when advertising your charitable event. The first is reactive. The example they give to best describe reactive guilt: you get your bill at a restaurant and you notice an item that you bought and consumed was missing (Hibbert, Smith, Davies, Ireland 733).

Anticipatory guilt is the second option, which includes going against your own personal standards. For example, making up a white lie so as not attend something.

Lastly, existential guilt which creates strong empathy, the feeling you have so much more than someone else (Hibbert, Smith, Davies, Ireland 733). This feeling of empathy makes one respond as though they have a certain social obligation to act. When marketing for our Soles4Souls event, we felt as though creating a type of statistical data situation would be most effective. Following that, we decided existential guilt would be most applicable. When marketing our event in face-to-face interactions we would use verbal techniques to describe the negative circumstances that children and adults must face in low poverty areas. Leading our potential attendees to believe, rightfully so, these conditions could be ameliorated if they were willing to act. The flyers and Facebook event we created would be our existential guilt appeal, as well as visual technique to capture attention and appeal through social media for their help.

   The author Cialdini has created a model titled the "Negative State Model" which argues that people will always seek to avoid negative emotions. Connected to charitable events, if we were to use an anecdotal guilt trigger, our audience would then try to reduce these feelings of guilt by donating money along with their old pair of running shoes. Before launching into an evocative guilt appeal for our campaign, we had to question how much guilt trigger is enough? Communication scholars, Coulter and Pinto found that the most effective levels of guilt lie within the more moderate levels. High levels of guilt appeal were correlated with emotions such as anger and annoyance. His studies concluded that advertisements with a moderate guilt trigger were most effective, and actually led people to feeling more guilty (Coulter, Pinto 701). When developing the proper type of guilt trigger to use upon our audience we decided that statistical evidence would be the most effective. We did not want our message to be annoying, or our

message to seem as though it was crossing the boundary and pushing for too much empathy.

Cognitive Dissonance

Another theory to examine involves the use of cognitive dissonance originated by Leon Festinger. Festinger describes this as the feeling of discomfort when simultaneously holding two or more conflicting ideas, beliefs, values or emotional reactions. In a state of dissonance, people may sometimes feel disequilibrium. The classic example being Festinger's and Carlsmith's experiment in which students were forced to do a repetitive, tedious task for over an hour, generating negative attitudes. One group was paid one dollar and the other group was paid twenty dollars. The two groups then had to explain their jobs to other people. As Festinger explains, "When paid only one dollar, students were forced to internalize the attitude they were induced to express, because they had no other justification. Those in the twenty dollar condition, however, had an obvious external justification for their behavior, and thus experienced less dissonance" (*Communication Theories*). Based upon this theory, if our donors were to sacrifice more of their money and personal pairs of shoes, they would be more likely to view our event as a crucial and their participation as worthwhile. Also they would also be more likely to believe their sacrifice would have more of a direct impact. We even asked others to help spread the word, creating another area of dissonance within their mind. Because they helped spread the word of our event they had to assure themselves that it was an event worth talking about. That their direct action would make an active attempt to help those living in poverty. By helping to spread our idea, they too were aligning with the notion of Social Proof.

Social Proof

The idea of Social proof becomes a major factor to consider when persuading our audience. "This principle of social proof applies when we determine what is correct by finding out what other people think is correct…it provides a convenient shortcut for determining the way to behave" (Cialdini 99). The concept of social proof will be incredibly important when planning our event. An important facet of this idea is that we tend to follow what others like us believe or are doing.

Accomodation

Another principle we would explore within the planning of our event is in regards to the Communication Accommodation Theory developed by Howard Giles. Accomodation theory could best be described as "when people interact they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures, to accommodate to others. It explores the various reasons why individuals emphasize or minimize the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and nonverbal communication" (Accomodation Theory). We would seek to develop this type of convergence between communication styles and the actions we desired from our audience. However, we had to be very careful not to cross our boundaries and lead into a type of divergence. Divergence is linked to "when individuals try to engage in convergence they can also end up over-accommodating, and despite their good intentions their convergence can be seen as condescending" (*Accomodation Theory*). Tiffany and I would have to accommodate to our prime audience of San Luis Obispo families, as well as young individuals looking to improve the wellness of the world. Accommodating to the main group of individuals who we felt would help with our shoe donation the most. Because we chose to market our

event through Running Warehouse, our prime audience would be through their clientele. This is a large range of people varying from students, athletes, to families of all types. We created our Facebook event to be framed around seeming more "fun or more of a social activity. Our flyer was aimed to look more professional and appeal to those outside of the college world.

We would have to accommodate ourselves differently towards these realms of people, but we must not over accommodate ourselves to seem unauthentic. When handing out flyers to families in the San Luis area, our speech revolved more around emphasizing the hard facts. We felt that the more statistics we used to convey the desperate help in varying areas, the more willing our older residents would be towards helping. Our approach greatly differed when approaching our younger audience. When spending a weekend handing out our flyers downtown in local popular stores, it was much more about presenting ourselves in a memorable way. Being overly friendly, and perceiving our event to be a fun social experience. When discussing my event at MINDBODY during work, I would accommodate those who had a strong interest in fitness. Many of my co-workers actively engage in outside fitness gyms, recreational centers, and some of their favorite stores happen to be athletically based. I accommodated to their needs by explaining how our event would take place at the Running Warehouse, and how many of the stores top athletes would also be attending. The event accommodated to my co workers desires of being seen as a fitness affiliate and would provide them the chance to socialize with other members of the like. I also discussed the idea with my direct manager, who felt as though it was a great idea and wanted to help as well. He sent out a mass email himself, reiterating the importance of helping others. He

used the MINDBODY motto of leveraging technology to improve the health and wellness of the world. Not only did this strike at the core for my fellow employee's beliefs, but also being sent from our direct manager is a form of authority that would be seen as more salient than from my personal email.

Reciprocity

It is also very important to consider Reciprocity theory. People notice acts of kindness and will strive to eliminate any type of "debt" they may owe to another. "Consequences trigger different reciprocal responses in different environments. Finally, the theory explains why outcomes tend to be fair in bilateral interactions whereas extremely unfair distributions may arise in competitive markets" (Fishbacher, Fehr 398). When each individual enters our charity event we would immediately hand them a Running Warehouse sticker showing our appreciation for their attendance. We realize that a sticker is a small gift that might not generate the donations we would hope for. If we were at liberty to present our attendees with a gift card to the store, it might substantially increase donations. This is one aspect of our event that Tiffany and I could have spent more time developing.

Non-Profit Organizations

One of the resources we used to finalize our development was *Communication and Small Profit Organizations* by Kathy Bonk. Ms. Bonk focuses on the steps taken to build your overall goal when planning a non-profit event. Her first goal focuses on spelling out your group's mission. What it is exactly you are trying to accomplish. Secondly present your goal to your target audience in a clear and compelling manner (Bonk, Griggs, Tynes 32). Tiffany and I had agreed upon a specific number of donations

we would hope to receive, an amount that would have a significant impact. We decided our goal would be to achieve 60 pairs of shoes.

Bonk's third step involves a commitment to being proactive. We will continue to enforce the idea that our event would have a direct impact towards those in need in Africa, and we would do that through statistical evidence such as, "Shoes help prevent the spread of parasitic diseases such as diabetes and hookworm, that plague over 1.4 billion people worldwide; shoes are a basic human necessity. The number of barefoot, orphaned children in Sub-Saharan Africa alone is estimated to be above 20 million. Over 300 million children worldwide are without shoes" (Soles4Souls.org). The helpful thing about our event is it is primarily organized around the basis of helping others. This aligns well with my personal core beliefs and aspirations within life. Therefore, it is easy for me to feel enthused about what it is our event would be accomplishing.

Final Goal

I would say our Soles4Souls event was a success in the way Tiffany and I demonstrated strong communication skills towards attracting many attendees. We want to succeed in our efforts to draw in an audience for an event that has previously never been held for Running Warehouse. The reality is that not every country is as fortunate as we are, and without even the simplest of attire, many children are unable access to schools. We would appeal to our audience by making the need for shoes of paramount importance. We will emphasize the fact that there are individuals in underdeveloped nations where owning a pair of shoes is simply unheard of. Admittedly this type of statistical evidence is a negative approach. Because of this we will have to constantly remain upbeat. We optimistically suggested a way in which we can actively help, that by

giving up one pair of shoes, you are giving back to a community that desperately needs your help. We will create a sense of immediacy, that "You" are an active participant in our effort towards helping children and adults in areas of poverty.

Our prime goal will be to gather groups of individuals ranging in age, economic status, and level of fitness affiliation. Our biggest challenge will be obtaining substantial funding towards our shipping cost. We have been given the chance to use the many communication tools we have learned over the years, and use them towards a good cause.

Event Outcome

We were able to gather fifty two pairs of shoes to donate to Soles4Souls. We were short of our overall goal yet, we still viewed this as a success. We had hoped to gather more money to help cover the cost of shipping. One way in which we could have helped increase our funding would be to pitch the need for donation as strongly as we did the pitch for shoes. We were only able to gain thirty dollars towards the cost of our shipping. I believe we could have pushed further towards though who donated shoes, yet we failed to previously market the importance within the cost for shipping. Within our event descriptions and flyers we seemed to only recognize the direct need for shoes, and labeled the addition of money to be a plus.

We had a wide range of people attend our event, most being college students. We leveraged the use of the Communication Studies Club to help spread our idea, and because we know most of our colleagues they felt obliged to help. The same type of social proof was seen through our attendees consisting of fellow employees from Tiffany and I. Running Warehouse admired our enthusiasm for our cause, enough to want to continue this idea and give back to those in need. After the event we discussed various

options to keep an idea such as ours running within their store. One of these ideas brought up was giving a ten percent discount towards every new pair of shoes, with every pair of old shoes donated.

One aspect that I did not think about until the end of our event was Tiffany's athletic background and mine. The last four years attending Cal Poly I competed as part of the Track and Field, and Cross Country team. The last four years Tiffany performed as a part of the Women's Soccer team. Because we are no longer a part of this affiliate, we failed to recognize the tremendous amount of donations and shoes we could have received by marketing to the student athlete population more specifically. These are some of the things we would have to keep in mind when planning another non-profit event.

Reflection

As a partnership I would say Tiffany and I performed very well. I was worried to begin with, as we are best friends and roommates. Though we are very similar we seem to complement each other in the best ways when dealing with other people. We know how to counterbalance our different communication/persuasive techniques. While she knows how to first real people in with her charm, I know how to not be obvious or seem pushy when it comes to persuading. While there were some disappointments, overall I would say our planning for this event has been a success. I have learned not only a tremendous amount about planning an event, but also a lot about myself as well. Planning an event such as Sole4Souls takes much more attention to detail than I had ever imagined. I am proud of myself for the way in which I have remained optimistic, passionate, and believing whole-heartedly on what it is we are doing for adults and children in need.

We must insist that together we can truly make a difference. We would push forward the notion that, "If you think you are too small to make a difference, you've obviously never been in a bed with a mosquito" (Walker). We hope that this clear and compelling appeal will unlock the sense of good will lying within almost all of us. And that once released these charitable impulses will result in a successful event and provide some relief for those of us who need it most.

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